

_____**Lewis Cass**_____

REMOVAL of the INDIANS

North American Review, January 1830

____Excerpts____

[Beginning of article]

ART. III.—Documents and Proceedings relating to the Formation and Progress of a Board in the City of New York, for the Emigration, Preservation, and Improvement of the Aborigines of America. July 22, 1829.

THE destiny of the Indians, who inhabit the cultivated portions of the territory of the United States, or who occupy positions immediately upon their borders, has long been a subject of deep solicitude to the American government and people. Time, while it adds to the embarrassments and distress of this part of our population, adds also to the interest which their condition excites, and to the difficulties attending a satisfactory solution of the question of their eventual disposal, which must soon pass *sub judice*¹. . . .

. . . The Indians have gradually decreased since they became first known to the Europeans. The ratio of this diminution may have been greater or less, depending on the operation of causes we shall presently investigate; but there is no just reason to believe, that any of the tribes, within the whole extent of our boundary, has been increasing in numbers at any period since they have been known to us. . . .

To the operation of the physical causes, which we have described, must be added the moral causes connected with their mode of life, and their peculiar opinions. Distress could not teach them providence, nor want industry. As animal food decreased, their vegetable productions were not increased. Their habits were stationary and unbending; never changing with the change of circumstances. How far the prospect around them, which to us appears so dreary, may have depressed and discouraged them, it is difficult to ascertain, as it is also to estimate the effect upon them of that superiority, which we have assumed and they have acknowledged. There is a principle of repulsion in ceaseless activity, operating through all their institutions, which prevents them from

¹ *sub judice*: still under consideration by a court of law; not yet decided; unsettled.

appreciating or adopting any other modes of life, or any other habits of thought or action, but those which have descended to them from their ancestors.

That the aboriginal population should decrease under the operation of these causes, can excite no surprise. From an early period, their rapid declension and ultimate extinction were foreseen and lamented, and various plans for their preservation and improvement were projected and pursued. Many of them were carefully taught at our seminaries of education, in the hope that principles of morality and habits of industry would be acquired, and that they might stimulate their countrymen by precept and example to a better course of life. Missionary stations were established among various tribes, where zealous and pious men devoted themselves with generous ardor to the task of instruction, as well in agriculture and the mechanic arts, as in the principles of morality and religion. The Roman Catholic Church preceded the Protestant, in this labor of charity; and the *Lettres Edifiantes*² are monuments of her zeal and liberality. Unfortunately, they are monuments also of unsuccessful and unproductive efforts. What tribe has been civilized by all this expenditure of treasure, and labor, and care? . . .

The cause of this total failure cannot be attributed to the nature of the experiment, nor to the character, qualifications, or conduct, of those who have directed it. The process and the persons have varied, as experience suggested alterations in the one, and a spirit of generous self-devotion supplied the changes in the other. But there seems to be some insurmountable obstacle in the habits or temperament of the Indians, which has heretofore prevented, and yet prevents, the success of these labors. Whatever this may be, it appears to be confined to the tribes occupying this part of the continent. In Mexico and South America, a large portion of the aboriginal race has accommodated itself to new circumstances, and forms a constituent part of the same society with their conquerors. Under the Spanish *régime* they existed as a degraded cast; but still they were sedentary, living under the protection of the laws, and providing by labor for their comfortable subsistence. . . .

The relative condition of the two races of men, who yet divide this portion of the continent between them, is a moral problem involved in much obscurity. The physical causes we have described, exasperated by the moral evils introduced by them, are sufficient to account for the diminution and deterioration of the Indians. But why were not these causes counteracted by the operation of other circumstances? As civilization shed her light upon them, why were they blind to its beams? Hungry or naked, why did they disregard, or retarding, why did they neglect, those arts by which food and clothing could be procured? Existing for two centuries in contact with a civilized

² *Lettres Edifiantes*: essays concerning French Jesuit missions in various parts of the world; first published in 1707.

people, they have resisted, and successfully too, every effort to meliorate their situation, or to introduce among them the most common arts of life. Their moral and their intellectual condition have been equally stationary. And in the whole circle of their existence, it would be difficult to point to a single advantage which they have derived from their acquaintance with the Europeans. All this is without a parallel in the history of the world. That it is not to be attributed to the indifference or neglect of the whites, we have already shown. There must then be an inherent difficulty, arising from the institutions, character, and condition of the Indians themselves.

On this subject the world has had enough of romantic description. It is time for the soberness of truth and reality. Rousseau and the disciples of his school, with distempered imaginations and unsettled reason, may persuade themselves of the inferiority of civilized to savage life; hut he who looks abroad over the forests of our country, and upon the hapless beings who roam through them, will see how much they endure, that we are spared. It is difficult to conceive that any branch of the human family can be less provident in arrangement, less frugal in enjoyment, less industrious in acquiring, more implacable in their resentments, more ungovernable in their passions, with fewer principles to guide them, with fewer obligations to restrain them, and with less knowledge to improve and instruct them. We speak of them as they are; as we have found them after a long and intimate acquaintance; fully appreciating our duties and their rights, all that they have suffered and lost, and all that we have enjoyed and acquired.

It is not our intention to undertake a delineation of the Indian character. We shall content ourselves with sketching such features as may serve to explain the difficulty which has been experienced in extending to them the benefit of our institutions, and in teaching them to appreciate their value.

Every Indian submits in youth to a process of severe mental and corporeal discipline. During its course, frequent intervals of long and rigid abstinence are enjoined, by which the system is reduced, and the imagination rendered more susceptible. Dreams are encouraged, and by these the novice is taught both his duty and his destiny, and in them his guardian *manitou*, who is to protect him in life and attend him in death, appears in the shape of some familiar animal, thenceforth to be the object of his adoration. He is taught to despise death, and during his whole life he regards it with indifference. An Indian seldom commits suicide, not because the grave does not offer him a refuge, hut because patience and fortitude are the first duties of a warrior, and none but a coward can yield to pain or misfortune. This sternness of purpose is another lesson early taught.

He learns also to despise labor, to become a warrior and a hunter, to associate the idea of disgrace with any other employment, and to leave to the women all the ordinary duties of life. He is a stern and unbending fatalist. Whatever of good or of evil may happen, he receives it with imperturbable calmness. If misfortunes press upon him, which he cannot resist, he can die; and he
90 dies without a murmur. The opinions, traditions, and institutions of his own tribe, are endeared to him by habit, feeling, and authority; and from early infancy he is taught, that the Great Spirit will be offended by any change in the customs of his red children, which have all been established by him. Reckless of consequences, he is the child of impulse. Unrestrained by moral considerations, whatever his passions prompt he does. Believing all the wild and debasing superstitions which have come down to him, he has no practical views of a moral superintendence to protect or to punish him. Government is unknown among them; certainly, that government which prescribes general rules and enforces or vindicates them. The utter nakedness of their society can be known only by personal observation. The tribes seem to be held together by a kind of family ligament; by the ties of blood, which in the infancy of society are stronger as other associations are weaker. They have no criminal
100 code, no courts, no officers, no punishments. They have no relative duties to enforce, no debts to collect, no property to restore. They are in a state of nature, as much so as it is possible for any people to be. Injuries are redressed by revenge, and strength is the security for right. . . .

It is easy, in contemplating the situation of such a people, to perceive the difficulties to be encountered in any effort to produce a radical change in their condition. The *fulcrum* is wanting, upon which the lever must be placed. They are contented as they are; not contented merely, but clinging with a death-grasp to their own institutions. This feeling, inculcated in youth, strengthened in manhood, and nourished in age, renders them inaccessible to argument or remonstrance. To roam the forests at will, to pursue their game, to attack their enemies, to spend the rest of their lives in listless indolence, to eat inordinately when they have food, to suffer patiently when they have none,
110 and to be ready at all times to die; these are the principal occupations of an Indian. But little knowledge of human nature is necessary, to be sensible how unwilling a savage would be to exchange such a life for the stationary and laborious duties of civilized society. . . .

. . . If the Christian and civilized governments of Europe asserted jurisdiction over the aboriginal tribes of America, and, under certain limitations, a right to the country occupied by them, some peculiar circumstances must have existed to vindicate a claim, at first sight revolting to the common justice of mankind. And if these circumstances were not then, and are not now, sufficiently powerful to justify such pretensions, their interference was culpable, and so would be ours. The

Indians are entitled to the enjoyment of all the rights which do not interfere with the obvious designs of Providence, and with the just claims of others. Like many other practical questions, it may be
120 difficult to define the actual boundary of right between them and the civilized states, among whom or around whom they live. But there are two restraints upon ourselves, which we may safely adopt,—that no force should be used to divest them of any just interest they possess, and that they should be liberally remunerated for all they may cede. We cannot be wrong while we adhere to there [these] rules. . . .

There can be no doubt, and such are the views of the elementary writers upon the subject, that the Creator intended the earth should be reclaimed from a state of nature and cultivated; that the human race should spread over it, procuring from it the means of comfortable subsistence, and of increase and improvement. A tribe of wandering hunters, depending upon the chase for support, and deriving it from the forests, and rivers, and lakes, of an immense continent, have a very imperfect
130 possession of the country over which they roam. That they are entitled to such supplies as may be necessary for their subsistence, and as they can procure, no one can justly question. But this right cannot be exclusive, unless the forests which shelter them are doomed to perpetual unproductiveness. Our forefathers, when they landed upon the shores of this continent, found it in a state of nature, traversed, but not occupied, by wandering hordes of barbarians, seeking a precarious subsistence, principally from the animals around them. They appropriated, as they well might do, a portion of this fair land to their own use, still leaving to their predecessors in occupation all that was needed, and more than was used by them. . . .

The elementary writers of Europe have frequently discussed the questions of the relative rights and duties of civilized and savage nations, to which the discovery of the New World has given
140 rise. And their conclusions are in conformity with the view we have presented. ‘Vattel’³ had just notions of the value of these aboriginal rights of savages, and of the true principles of natural law in relation to them. He observes, that the cultivation of the soil was an obligation imposed by nature upon mankind, and that the human race could not well subsist or greatly multiply, if rude tribes, which had not advanced from the hunter state, were entitled to claim and retain all the boundless forests through which they might wander. If such people will usurp more territory than they can subdue and cultivate, they have no right to complain, if a nation of cultivators puts in a claim for a part. Though the conquest of the half-civilized empires of Mexico and Peru was a palpable usurpation, and an act of atrocious injustice, the establishment of the French and English colonies in

³ Emmerich de Vattel: Swiss legal philosopher, author of influential *The Law of Nations* (1758).

North America was entirely lawful; and the colonists have not deviated from the precepts of the law
150 of nature, in confining the natives within narrower limits. . . . ’*

Impressed with the conviction, that a removal from their present position and from the vicinity of our settlements, to the regions beyond the Mississippi, can alone preserve from final extinction the remnant of our aboriginal population, a number of benevolent men have associated themselves, and established a society under the appellation of ‘The Indian Board, for the Emigration, Preservation, and Improvement of the Aborigines of America,’ the objects of which are distinctly indicated by this title. The Society avows its intention to ‘afford to the emigrant Indians all the necessary instruction in the arts of life and the duties of religion,’ and pledges itself ‘to cooperate with the federal government of the United States in its operations on Indian affairs, and at no time to contravene its laws.’ The constitution and first proceedings of the society are contained in the
160 pamphlet named at the head of this article; and the same pamphlet contains also an address from Colonel McKenney⁴ to the Society, and a letter from that gentleman to Mr Evarts,⁵ in both of which the general subject of Indian emigration is considered, and in the latter the peculiar circumstances of the Southern tribes are stated and explained. Colonel McKenney’s investigations into the condition of the Indians, and into the causes which have obstructed their advancement in civilization and religion, and have counteracted our efforts to improve them, are just and striking, and evince an intimate knowledge of their character and disposition.

‘Need I stop to demonstrate,’ he observes, ‘how utterly impracticable it is, to remodel the Indian character, and fashion it after the civilized form, situated as those tribes are within our states? Where is the example of a single transformation in a tribe, of this sort? I know of not one. But I
170 know of many, in which, even amidst efforts the most untiring, the Indians have (although individuals have profited) disappeared; until, now, many of our states, that once swarmed with an Indian population, contain not a vestige of one. Whence comes this decay and final disappearing of the red before the white man? It comes not of the color, nor of physical nor moral malformation, nor of destiny,—but from causes the most natural, which a change in our relations to each other would work, even upon us. The elements may all be found to be in the intellectual, moral, political, and social relations which exist between them and us. . . . That men, and good men, should differ in their

* Kent’s Commentaries, Vol. III. p. 313, 314. [footnote in original; quoted text from James Kent, *Commentaries on American Law*, oft-cited volumes in antebellum period]

⁴ Colonel Thomas L. McKenney: Superintendent of Indian Trade from 1816 to 1823; supported the creation of the Office of Indian Affairs (now Bureau) in 1821.

⁵ Jeremiah Evarts: author of 26 essays, published in 1829 under the pseudonym “William Penn,” opposing removal of the Cherokees.

views of what ought to be done for the preservation and improvement of our Indians, is natural. We know there are men, and good men, who are opposed to the emigration of the Indians. We respect them and their motives. They seek to save and civilize these people. We profess to aim at the accomplishment of the same end, and differ only as to the mode. We once entertained similar views of this question with them, and thought it practicable to preserve and elevate the character of our Indians, even in their present anomalous relations to the states, but it was “distance that lent enchantment to the view.” We have since seen for ourselves, and that which before looked like flying clouds, we found, on a nearer approach, to be impassable mountains. We believe, if the Indians do not emigrate, and fly the causes which are fixed in themselves, and which have proved so destructive in the past, *they must perish*. We might distrust our own conclusions, though derived from personal investigation, did not experience confirm them. But alas! it is the admonition of experience, more than anything else, that claims and urges us to employ all honorable means to persuade these hapless people to acquiesce in the policy which is proposed to them. . . . We esteem it to be our duty, on this occasion, to correct an error which has obtained in regard to this business of emigration. It seems to be thought by some, that the Indians are opposed to removal, and that force is meditated to be employed to compel them to go. In regard to the disposition of the *great body* of the Indians within our states, we speak advisedly when we say, they are *anxious to remove*. The present excitement is occasioned, in great part, by the opposition of those persons, whose interest it is to keep the Indians where they are. Protection has actually been sought of the government by those who wish to better their destiny, against the threats of others, in which an enrolment for emigration has been forbidden on pain of death. This may be received as the real state of the case, obtained in good part by us on personal opportunities, and from official information, confirming our observation and experience. In regard to the employment of force, to drive the Indians from the country they inhabit, so far from this being correct, they have been told by the Executive, in one of the documents read to you to-night, that if they choose to remain, they shall be protected in all their rights. . . .⁶

. . . it cannot be denied and ought not to be concealed, that in this transplantation from the soil of their ancestors to the plains of the Mississippi, some mental and corporeal sufferings await the emigrants. These are inseparable from the measure itself. But by an appropriation liberally made, and prudently applied, the journey may be rendered as easy for them, as for an equal number of our own people. By a continuation of the same liberality, arrangements may be made for their comfortable support, after their arrival in the land of refuge, and until they can accommodate

⁶ End of McKenney text in this edited selection.

themselves to the circumstances of their situation; until they can secure from the earth or the forests, the means of subsistence, as they may devote themselves to the pursuits of agriculture or of the chase.

210 The amount of the expenditure necessary for their migration and establishment is not a subject for serious consideration. All should be given, and all no doubt will be given, that can be reasonably employed in their comfortable support. It is not a question of profit or loss, but a great question of national policy, involving the rights and feelings of those, from whom we have obtained much, and for whom we have done little. . . .

 . . . Let the whole subject be fully explained to the Indians. Let them know that the establishment of an independent government is a hopeless project; which cannot be permitted, and which, if it could be permitted, would lead to their inevitable ruin. Let the offer of a new country be made to them, with ample means to reach it and to subsist in it, with ample security for its peaceful and perpetual possession, and with a pledge, in the words of the Secretary of War,⁷ ‘that the most
220 enlarged and generous efforts, by the government, will be made to improve their minds, better their condition, and aid them in their efforts of self-government.’ Let them distinctly understand, that those who are not disposed to remove, but wish to remain and submit to our laws, will, as the President has told the Creeks, ‘have land laid off for them and their families, in fee.’ When all this is done, no consequences can affect the character of the government, or occasion regret to the nation. The Indians would go, and go speedily and with satisfaction. A few perhaps might linger around the site of their council-fires; but almost as soon as the patents could be issued to redeem the pledge made to them, they, would dispose of their possessions and rejoin their countrymen. And even should these prefer ancient associations to future prospects, and finally melt away before our people and institutions, the result must be attributed to causes, which we can neither stay nor control. If a
230 paternal authority is exercised over the aboriginal colonies, and just principles of communication with them, and of intercommunication among them, are established and enforced, we may hope to see that improvement in their condition, for which we have so long and so vainly looked.
[End of Article]⁸

⁷ John H. Eaton.

⁸ Full text available from the *Making of America* digital library.

<http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/moa/moa-cgi?notisid=ABQ7578-0030-5>